# Start of Love letters to my dear Ruth :

## AR 11735

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AR 11735 V1 Love letters to my dear Ruth, 1937-1938

"LOVE LETTERS TO MY DEAR RUTH"

On March 10, 1937, my father, Kurt Levi, said good bye to his fiancee' Ruth Neumann in Krefeld, Germany, to begin his journey to find a new home in a land he had never seen. He left behind his parents, his law degree, and the life of wealth and success that he had enjoyed in Wiesbaden, Germany.

During the next 7 months, Kurt struggled to make his way to America through Cuba; find family and friends from Germany who were now scattered around the United States; secure employment, and plan a visit from his parents to New York before Kristallnacht. He typed over 70 letters during this time period, on flimsy onion skin stationery, at great length, and in incredible detail, to his parents and wife to be, recounting the difficulties of finding his way to America and maintaining his ties of love and affection with those he left behind. My father died in 2000, but throughout his life he carefully laid aside the "carbon copies" of each these letters as memories of his journey to America.

I am the only child of this 57 year marriage. The letters are beautifully composed and emotionally charged. For me, they are the story of my parents love for each other. Kurt was 27, and Ruth 24, children by today's standards in many ways. For the reader, they are a fascinating description of the struggle to leave a life of beauty, of family, of vacations in the Alps, of religious observance in a country hostile by any standard to Judaism, of financial success, of a future interrupted by hatred.

In the late 1930's no one was sure that Hitler would succeed in his determination to wipe my family and the other Jews of Germany from the face of the earth. Somehow, Kurt and Ruth had the vision to escape, interrupting their lives and separating their close-knit family. How could people of this age make this decision? How did they communicate to one another from ocean vessel, to Cuba, to Germany, to America? How did they finance and plan their escape? What did they do when they set foot in America, a country they knew little about? These are among the stories the letters tell.

The reflections and detail in my father's letters make the story vivid and real. Kurt was a well-educated, accomplished young man who wrote with great beauty, clarity, and a sense for the romantic which he never lost. The richness of these letters is in the strength of their love and their fervent desire to establish roots in America. They describe in great detail the difficulties of travel and communication; the joy of Judaism; the importance of family strength in this time of world uncertainty.

There must be thousands of stories like this from this Nazi era before the mass deportation of Jews- stories of separation, of love and relocation. But what makes these letters so unique is the completeness of the story, the authenticity, the day to day experiences they recount, and how Hitler was defeated by individual efforts such as those of my parents.

The seventy letters tell many remarkable stories:

- Difficulties of overcoming restrictions to immigration to America
- Life in Cuba in the thirties, and the impressions of a young man who had never seen this life, of abundant colors and temptations to be avoided
- Making preparations to immigrate

- Financial dealing to move money from Germany to live in America
- Keeping the traditions of orthodox Judaism- Sabbath and holiday observances- aboard ship, in Cuba, and in America and the joy of tasting kosher food after years of having none
- Settling in New York and seeking work, eventually moving to Washington to take a menial job to earn enough to bring Ruth and his parents to the United States
- Transatlantic communication in a time of impending war
- Arranging for a visit and return to Germany weeks before Kristallnacht
- Learning a new trade and a new language
- "Networking" with a group of other German immigrants
- Denial of affidavits by those who could have saved relatives
- Constant reassurance that he remained true to her, and that he was certain that she acted with the same fidelity

But the most prevalent theme of these remarkable letters is love- the love of a couple in their twenties, as war looms in Europe, remaining true to one another in the most difficult of circumstances, escaping Nazi surveillance, and reuniting in America, only to see many family members perish in concentration camps. The letters are written aboard ship, from a hotel I have visited in Havana, and from tear soaked pillows in his room alone at night.

These letters show how religion stabilized my father's life through these difficult months. They tell a tale of a foiled plan to evade Nazi and American obstinacy in allowing young people of strong education and wealth from emigrating to the United States, and how a planned "message" system failed to work around the restrictions.

Denied entry into America, and forced to spend time in Cuba, it was only through the work of the National Council of Jewish Women, the determination of my father to succeed, and the good will of one American official that made the difference.

The reuniting of this young couple was told in a full length story and beautiful picture in the February 18, 1938, edition of the Washington Herald, my mother holding the roses that my father brought to the ship before he whisked her away for the marriage ceremony performed by a rabbi in the home he had made in a Jewish lady's boarding home.

The consistent message to my mother was that they must focus their attention of accomplishing their goal of reuniting in America. Nothing could deter them, and nothing was as important.

This is a story I want to tell to an audience today that struggles with laws of immigration. It is a story of a struggle that most twenty year olds today could not win. It is a story of how America stands as the symbol of freedom and opportunity.

My parents were deeply in love for over fifty seven years, I am their only son and the last remaining blood relative over the many people alive in the 1930's. Through all these difficulties Kurt and Ruth remained true to their religion and their families. Not many of us could do this successfully, and the

story of my parents as told through my father's eyes and typewriter are fascinating reading, a complete set of letters that tell this story of love.

My father had a life-long favorite expression, taken from a prayer recited on major Jewish festivals. It translates: "This is the day the L-ord created; it should be celebrated and enjoyed". This optimism and love of life, of religion, and family is what motivated him for the 90 years of his life, and nowhere is this optimism more apparent than in the letters he wrote to my mother and his parents as he reestablished his life in America.

**End of Love letters to my dear Ruth :**